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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

17 October 1985

ETHIOPIA: Human Rights Violations in the North [redacted]

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Summary

During the often bitter fighting that has ravaged northern Ethiopia for over two decades, human rights violations have been committed by the Ethiopian government and rebel forces alike. Addis Ababa's large resettlement effort is rife with human rights violations, for example, and insurgent forces often commit violations while attempting to disrupt government relief programs. In addition, much of the fighting in the north occurs in rural areas, resulting in some destruction of crops and grain storage facilities. [redacted]

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This memorandum was requested by Alexander R. Love, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa, AID. It was prepared by [redacted] Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, East Africa Branch, ALA, [redacted]

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### Background

The Mengistu regime came to power in 1977, inheriting well-entrenched insurgencies in Eritrea and Tigray Provinces. The military government had imposed country-wide martial law in November 1974 that limited civil rights and generally gave the Army jurisdiction over civilians. Mengistu's subsequent drive to create Marxist-Leninist institutions has led to collectivization of some farms and the formation of party cells at the local level to facilitate decisionmaking and to monitor political loyalty in towns and villages. These policies, although not specifically directed toward the insurgents, form the political context for state encroachment upon individual choice under the present regime, in contrast with the harsh but less pervasive imperial rule of Haile Selassie. [ ]

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While both the Ethiopian government and the northern insurgents commit human rights violations, both sides also attempt to devise and implement programs to win the loyalty of the local population, which finds itself caught in the middle of a bitter struggle. In Eritrea and Tigray, for example, the rebels have built schools and medical clinics and initiated their own land reform measures. For its part, the government has launched an extensive literacy campaign, built or improved highways, and attempted to increase industrial and agricultural development in the northern areas under its control. [ ]

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### The Violations

The Ethiopian government is committing clear-cut and wide-scale human rights violations in implementing its resettlement program, which has relocated over 500,000 people from the northern provinces to distant areas in western and southern Ethiopia. While Addis Ababa denies that force is being used, there is substantial evidence that the vast majority of settlers have been transported against their will and that little effort is being made to keep families together. Local and regional administrators have quotas to fill for resettlement, according to the US Embassy, and often use force to round up people from villages, relief camps, and feeding centers. According to US Embassy sources, the settlers are usually transported under armed guard, and security also is maintained around the resettlement camps to discourage defections. Despite protests from Western donors over these abuses, the Mengistu regime remains adamant, determined to achieve its goal of resettling a total of 1.2 million northerners by the end of 1986. [ ]

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[redacted] Ethiopian aircraft bombed relief convoys, refugee camps, and insurgent-controlled towns during the government offensive earlier this year. The Ethiopian government believes, [redacted] that the rebels use relief convoys to transport arms and that they use refugee camps in Sudan and Ethiopia for recruitment and other purposes. Eritrean and Tigrean spokesmen also have claimed on several occasions that government troops have burned fields and attempted to disrupt the planting and harvesting of crops in an effort to intensify the famine conditions in the north. [redacted]

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The insurgents, for their part, also have attacked relief convoys and vehicles on occasion, according to US Embassy reporting. For most of this year they have disrupted traffic on the main north-south highway in Tigray and northern Wollo provinces and have raided relief camps, at times taking volunteer workers prisoner. In the face of Army counterattacks, the rebels reportedly have destroyed food and equipment that they could not carry off to prevent them from falling into government hands. [redacted]

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Both the Ethiopian government and the insurgents confiscate vehicles and supplies, and periodically impress people into military service, [redacted] They also execute deserters, "enemy agents," and collaborators, usually without the formality of legal proceedings. There are reports that the Eritreans have executed Ethiopian prisoners of war, but this does not appear to be a standard practice. Several foreign observers in Eritrea have been allowed access to Army prisoners and report that they are well treated by the rebels. [redacted]

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#### Overall Assessment

The civil wars in Eritrea and Tigray are being bitterly pursued by both sides and the human rights of the population which finds itself caught in the middle appear, in our opinion, to be of secondary concern to the contestants. We have no evidence to indicate, however, that either side has a deliberate policy of destroying crops or farm facilities on a large scale, although some local commanders probably engage in these activities. According to the US Embassy, several relief workers recently stated that they had not seen crops that had been attacked with napalm nor did they believe Addis Ababa as a matter of policy burned crops during the recent fighting. We believe that much of the destruction in the north is an outgrowth of the wars themselves--conventional and guerrilla operations conducted for years by relatively large units in the countryside. [redacted]

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: Human Rights Violations in the North [ ]

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(16 October 1985)

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